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Thankful boy boosts blood drive

Liver recipient, 10, helps launch effort for state employees

By Hugh Leach
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Seth Sutherland wants others to have the second chance he was given.

The 10-year-old fifth-grader at St. Joseph School underwent a liver transplant last year that saved his life.

When the St. Johns boy and his parents were asked to help kick off a program aimed at increasing blood donations by state employees, he didn't hesitate.

"He's pretty excited about it," said his father, Robert Sutherland, who works for the Michigan Department of Corrections in Ionia.

Wearing a cap with the logo "State Employee Blood Challenge 2005-2006," Seth helped Michigan Surgeon General Kimberly-dawn Wisdom unveil a promotional poster Tuesday at the American Red Cross blood donor center in Lansing.

Seth, who was jaundiced and feeling tired, had tests at Sparrow Hospital last year and then was sent to C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, Robert Sutherland said.



(Photo by CHRIS HOLMES/Lansing State Journal)
Blood drive: Seth Sutherland, 10, of St. Johns, stands next to the poster announcing the State Employee Blood Challenge at the Red Cross in Lansing. With him are his parents, Deb and Robert Sutherland. Seth got a new liver last year.

Blood challenge

- **What:** Partnership between the state of Michigan and Michigan's major blood collection agencies to promote blood donations by the state's 55,000 employees
- **When:** Nov. 1, 2005 to Oct. 31, 2006
- **Where:** Blood drives will take place at work sites and in various communities
- **How:** Prizes and entry into drawings for weekend getaways are available to donors.
- **Goal:** Increase blood donations by state employees by 20 percent
- **Participants:** State employees, American Red Cross Blood Services, Michigan Community Blood Centers, Upper Peninsula Regional Blood Center

On the Web

- www.michigan.gov/bloodchallenge

Within two hours, doctors determined his liver was failing. The problem was so severe that he was moved to the top of the list to receive a donated liver. A match was quickly found, and Seth received the transplant less than a week later, on Nov. 11.

"It happened so quickly we didn't have the opportunity to participate in a blood drive to help him," said his mother, Deb Sutherland, who works at the Clinton County clerk's office. "Fortunately, we never had to be concerned with the availability of blood."

Seth, the youngest of the Sutherlands' four sons, still faces a few limitations but is leading a healthy, active life.

"I feel a lot better than I did a year ago," he said.

Two months after his surgery, he was cleared to play basketball. This summer, he played Little League baseball and hit his first home run.

"It felt really good," he said.

His father said Seth can play most sports.

"He probably won't be able to play football or hockey, and he knows that," Robert Sutherland said.

Seth's parents are both blood donors and have vowed to step up their efforts to encourage others to donate.

"It's quite a wake-up call when something like this happens close to you," Robert Sutherland said.

The new program aims to increase blood donations by 20 percent among the state's 55,000 employees.

Wisdom said 70 percent of the population is eligible to give blood, but only 5 percent of those actually do.

"Four million Americans need blood every year," she said. "That's about one every two seconds. Volunteer donors are the only source of blood products for hospital patients."

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